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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 005761

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PL](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIA HOPEFUL BUT CAUTIOUS ABOUT A BREAKTHROUGH
IN RELATIONS WITH POLAND

REF: MOSCOW 5585

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for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. Summary: The MFA told us that new Polish PM Tusk's pro-European stance, positive statements about Russia-Poland bilateral ties, his decision to remove Poland's veto on Russia's OECD accession, and recent efforts to address Russian concerns about Polish meat were clearly steps in the right direction. However, MFA Poland Section Chief Timur Tkachev and analysts stressed that Poland needed to do more to normalize ties, including lifting its veto on a Russia-EU PCA and addressing Russian concerns about U.S. missile defense plans in Poland. FM Lavrov's December 7 brief meeting with Polish FM Sikorski was aimed at gauging Poland's readiness for serious engagement. End summary.

MFA: Bilateral Relations Should Be Put Into Perspective

¶2. (C) MFA Poland Section Chief Timur Tkachev hesitated to characterize Russia's relations with Poland. Tkachev told us on December 6 that Russia-Poland economic and cultural ties have only intensified over time. He pointed out that bilateral trade between 2000-2006, for example, tripled to \$15 billion, and added that Russia's bilateral trade with the U.S. is almost exactly the same. Tkachev said that the key challenge in the bilateral relationship is for Poland "to stop politicizing essentially technical or otherwise non-political disagreements."

¶3. (C) Tkachev argued that because of the "ever-changing political dynamics" in Poland, Russia's political contact with Poland has ebbed and flowed. He said that the relationship hit a low point during the reign of the Kaczynski brothers. Tkachev joked that the historical animosity between the two countries made it difficult for any Polish leader to seek "normal" relations with Russia, but he argued that the Kaczynski brothers' "blatantly anti-Russia" policy line impaired Russia's relations both with Poland and the EU.

GOR Has Taken Note of Positive Signals from Tusk

¶4. (C) Tkachev was cautiously optimistic that the bilateral relationship would improve with Donald Tusks' emergence as Polish Prime Minister. Tkachev said Russia was fully aware that Poland's relationship with the U.S. would remain Tusk's top priority, but it seemed clear that Tusk was prepared to improve the "atmosphere" in Russia-Poland relations. Tusk's immediate issuance of positive statements about a desire to strengthen bilateral relations with Russia and his willingness to engage on such controversial issues as Poland's veto on a Russia-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and U.S. missile defense plans in Poland and

the Czech Republic were the right signals. Tkachev added Poland's recent efforts to satisfy Russian meat quality control standards and Tusk's announcement that Poland would lift its veto on Russia's accession to the OECD were important steps in the right direction. (Note: Tusk also offered only mild criticism of the Russian parliamentary elections, noting that the results of the elections "cannot be doubted.")

Why the Positive Signals?

15. (C) When asked to identify the possible motivations for what Tkachev characterized as Tusk's "more pragmatic" approach to Russia, Tkachev highlighted the Polish PM's generally pro-European vision, including his belief that Poland should contribute to -- and not threaten -- EU unity, as a key factor. Experts on Russia-Poland relations, such as IMEMO's Irina Kobrinskaya and MGIMO's Olga Butorina, agreed with the MFA's assessment. Kobrinskaya said that Tusk's electoral victory demonstrated that the Poles are "evolving from rebellious teenagers (vis-a-vis Russia) into a mature and confident EU member." Butorina added that Tusk's interest in improving bilateral ties with Germany requires Poland to put aside at least some of its differences with Russia. Tkachev and analysts said that it was also possible Poland was interested in gaining greater access to the rapidly growing Russian consumer market.

But Russia Has To See More To Believe

16. (C) Tkachev stressed that Russia has yet to draw any firm conclusions about the current state of bilateral relations with Poland, as Russia is waiting to see more concrete action from PM Tusk. Tkachev said that FM Lavrov would use his

December 7 meeting with Polish FM Sikorski on the margins of the NATO Ministerial to gauge Poland's readiness to reestablish regular political contact and discuss "with an open mind" such issues as Poland's participation in U.S. MD plans, the PCA, and Poland's objections to the Nord Stream gas pipeline project (reftel). Tkachev said the meeting would be brief, but important.

17. (C) Tkachev noted that Russia is also watching carefully Tusk's ability to steer the course of Russia-Poland relations, given that Lech Kaczynski as president and Jaroslav Kaczynski as opposition leader in parliament remain opposed to improved bilateral ties with Russia. Kobrinskaya added that Russia would need to see a stronger consensus among the political elite in Warsaw before it undertook more serious action to strengthen ties.

Comment

18. (C) Russia is unabashed in placing all the blame for the strain in its bilateral relationship on Poland and thus expects Poland to lead the way in normalizing ties. Russia will be pressing Tusk to make good on his promise to hear out (and hopefully address) Russia's concerns on missile defense.

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